

Watermelon festivals abound in August

If you can't find one near you, stage your own.

August is the month for watermelon festivals throughout the United States. Check for a festival in your area but if one isn't available, put on your own in your backyard or in a park. What could be better than an al fresco summer barbeque or picnic including ice cold, juicy watermelon? Invite friends and neighbors and enjoy!

History of Watermelon

According to the National Watermelon Promotion Board, watermelon is thought to have originated in the Kalahari Desert of Africa. The first recorded watermelon harvest occurred nearly 5,000 years ago in Egypt and is depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics on wall of their ancient buildings. Watermelons were often placed in the burial tombs of kings to nourish them in the afterlife.

From there, watermelons spread throughout countries along the Mediterranean Sea by way of merchant ships. By the 10th century, watermelon found its way to China that is now the world's number one producer of watermelon.

The 13th century found watermelon spread through the rest of Europe via the Moors. Southern food historian, John Egerton, believes watermelon made its way to the United States with African slaves as he states in his book, *Southern Food*.

Types and Varieties of Watermelon

About 200 – 300 varieties are grown in the U.S. and Mexico, although there are about 50 varieties that are very popular. You can do an online search or contact a seed company to find out more about common and historic watermelon varieties. The most common watermelon types are seedless (most popular in the U.S.), seeded, mini or personal-sized watermelons, yellow flesh and orange flesh watermelons.

How to Choose a Watermelon

1. Look the watermelon over. You are looking for a firm, symmetrical

watermelon that is free from bruises, cuts or dents.

2. Lift it up. The watermelon should be heavy for its size. Watermelon is 92 percent water; most of the weight is water.

3. Turn it over. The underside of the watermelon should have a creamy yellow spot from where it sat on the ground and ripened in the sun.

Storage and Handling of Watermelon

1. Handle your whole watermelon gently to avoid internal bruising.

2. Wash your hands.

3. Wash your watermelon in running water, rinse well and pat dry.

4. Cut the flesh from the rind and cut into 1-inch cubes.

5. Place in a covered container and refrigerate immediately.

6. Keep cut watermelon refrigerated until consumed, up to 3 – 4 days.

Carrot, Pistachio and Watermelon Salad

Yield: 8 – 10 servings.

Ingredients:

Blueberry vinaigrette:
½ cup blueberry vinegar or ¼ cup blueberry juice and ¼ cup red wine vinegar

1 teaspoon dried Italian herb blend
1 teaspoon cracked pepper or to taste
1 tablespoon honey
½ cup extra virgin olive oil

Betsy Slinkard Alexander

Not Your Grandmother's Recipes



4 cups shredded carrot
4 cups small-cubed seedless watermelon
1 cup roasted, salted and shelled, chopped pistachio nuts

Directions:

Whisk together the blueberry vinegar, Italian herb blend, pepper and honey. Whisk the olive oil into the mixture in a slow stream until thickened. Layer the shredded carrot, watermelon and pistachio nuts in a shallow bowl or deep serving platter. Pour the dressing all over the top and serve.

Grilled Kielbasa with Watermelon Relish

Yield: 12 servings as an appetizer.

Ingredients:

1 cup minced watermelon
¼ cup minced onion
½ cup finely chopped cabbage
2 tablespoons seasoned rice vinegar
2 tablespoons honey mustard
3 pounds kielbasa

Directions:

Mix the watermelon, onion and cabbage in a mixing bowl. In another small bowl slowly mix the vinegar into the mustard and then pour the mixture over the watermelon/onion/cabbage mixture and toss together. Grill the kielbasa until brown and crisp on the exterior but still juicy inside. Remove from grill to a cutting board and cool for 5 minutes before cutting the kielbasa into bite-sized pieces and skewer them with a pick. Serve warm with the relish for scooping with the kielbasa.



Betsy Slinkard Alexander provides freelance writing and public relations services with a focus on the food industry. She welcomes your ideas for future columns and can be reached at (831) 655-2098, betsyslinkard@sbcglobal.net or www.slinkardpr.com.

Butterfly Sanctuary docents will kick off season

The kick-off meeting for the 2009-2010 season will be on Saturday, September 5, at 10-11:30 a.m. at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History in the Education Room on the second floor. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Annie Holdren, Education and Volunteer Coordinator, at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. (831) 648-5716, ext. 17, aholdren@ci.pg.ca.us.

Pacific Grove Community Center Preschool

515 Junipero Avenue

Child-centered program for children 3-5 years of age

We provide a warm, loving atmosphere where children are encouraged to think, reason, question and experiment. Your child must be potty trained. Each class is limited to the first 15 students who enroll.

Age: 4 years of age by December 2009
Day/Time: Mon/Wed/Fri, 9:00am-12:00pm
Session: August 2009 – May 2010
Fees: \$185/month resident;
\$205/month non-resident

-- OR --

Age: 3 years of age by December 2009
Day/Time: Tues/Thurs, 9:00am-11:30am
Session: August 2009 – May 2010
Fees: \$120/month resident;
\$135/month non-resident

Location: Community Center
515 Junipero Ave.

Instructors: Cathy Toche-Tyndall, Director
Josie Cameron, Teacher

Register: City Hall, 300 Forest Ave.
648 – 3100



THE CONSONANT COWBOY

“Ride Through Town on a Proper Noun”

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